

Siberia's Morgues.

Horrible Practices in the Convict Colonies of Russia.

Bodies First Frozen and Then Piled About a Fire to Thaw Out.

A Growsome Custom of Tartar Times Still Observed by the Officials.

REFORMS PROMISED BY THE CZAR.

Efforts to Abolish a Barbarous System Likely to Bear Fruit—Ghastly Midnight Scenes in a Cellar Filled with Corpses.

Though no throb of pity for the wretches that have been and are today sent to bleak, frozen Siberia by the "administrative process" has yet moved the heart of the Great White Czar of All the Russias, that monarch has, with a dash of humanity, started in to accomplish a reform of one of that territory's greatest horrors. So secret have been the doings over the whole extent of this vast, storm-swept torture chamber of the most autocratic government of the world that only now has this outrage against civilization leaked out.

While sufficient machinery may not be at the Czar's hand to abolish the horror utterly, the reports that come from the Winter Palace say that he will mitigate it and strip it of its present ghastliness. Custom is hard to break and change in the Russias, and this grim practice has come down from Tartar times. The dead, whenever there is a suspicion of foul measures, are frozen stiff, packed away in a convenient cellar of a building in the centre of the district, and left there for months, to await the coming of the governmental clerk of the province.

That official has a great extent of territory to cover, steps so broad and spreading that he can only get around them three or four times a year. In the meantime the corpses lie shrouded in frost, kept for his official examination. He comes accompanied by his corps of dirty moujiks and the surgeon of the province. A roaring fire is built in the centre of this building, which has but one room. As the flames curl up merrily from the heap of fagots, the bodies, one by one, are dragged from their subterranean resting place, tied to stakes close to the fierce heat, and thawed out—literally and precisely—while the Czar's representative looks on.

Then each of the unfortunates, long since passed away, has the last word of the law said upon them, the surgeon ripping open, disemboweling, carving up each and all of them that he may detect the evidence of supposed crime.

Nor yet is the grisly picture complete. The Tartar worms its way, wave by wave, into those poor frozen bodies that, to make the horror all the more supreme, have been stripped naked, the arms and legs commencing to move as if some living vital force were controlling them, as if the electric spark of life were once more animating them.

George Kennan himself, in his most startling revelations of dread practices in Siberia, never found anything more horrible than this governmental custom. As has been said, the knowledge of it has been hitherto hidden, and it is doubtful if the high Government officials at St. Petersburg ever realized the outrage of it against civilization.

For, to say nothing of the barbarity of the present method, and leaving that side of the case out of consideration for the moment, crime has been hard to detect under these circumstances. In the months that would elapse before a suspicious body was examined the criminal would have time to get away, or if the elders of his village insisted upon holding him there was a strong probability against his detection, against the discovery of telling evidence. Terribly strict and violent in its way, the Siberian officials, owing to the continuance of old Tartar and Mongolian customs, have been lax and lenient in others. Crime on the steppes has been able to flourish to an amazing, to an overwhelming degree. There is no more striking evidence of this than the horrors of the freezing, then thawing and disemboweling the victims.

To adequately see the picture presented now here, now there, at hundreds of different points in the bare, vast land of Siberia—for each circle of villages, so far as is known, has its "centre house" for these dead—one must first understand the limitless expanse of that country, thousands of Russian versts, sparsely peopled great grazing lands in summer, a frozen continent in winter dotted over only by tiny hamlets that are far apart. Dense and ancient forests cover a considerable extent of it, but for the most part it is a land of never-ending plains, plains that in winter are twice as great because rivers and land form then one awful waste. The people of this region, in the dark winter days, when there is hardly a ray of sunlight seen, and a dull, grey light is all that exists even at midday, have little to do, save to drink vodka and quarrel. The entire mass of this population is unenlightened by knowledge of even the most primitive sort. Ignorant almost beyond belief is the Siberian moujik of these plains. Sudden and "accidental" deaths are therefore by no means rare. As a matter of fact, in proportion to the population, they are great in number. In any other country such a quantity of suspicious deaths would be startling. But in Siberia, so carefully are police secrets kept, and so iron is the rule of the provinces, that the facts do not creep out. Man after man may die suddenly and under the most peculiar circumstances, yet outside of suppressed police records no note of it would be made.

Immediately upon the commission of a crime, or when a crime is even suspected, the local authorities at once take possession of the body. They have no powers regarding it; their sole duty is to remove it to the deathhouse of the region which may be far beyond their village. Laid on a sled, the dead man makes his judicial pilgrimage to the subterranean room under the chamber that weeks later will be lit by fire. As the cortege glides along the howl of wolves can be heard in the far distance, and if the eyes of the driver and his companions be keen, they can see black moving specks silhouetted against the glaring snow. From afar these animals of the steppes seem to be able to scent the passing of the dead.

Unconsciously, at the arrival at the chamber of death, the body is lowered down into the cellar, there to be ranged alongside of other unfortunates who are awaiting the police. Not a vestige of respect the authorities show to these dead. It would be unjust, perhaps, to say of them that they actually steal the clothing off these corpses, but the presumption is certainly that they do, for in practically every case—and exception has yet to be found to this—the bodies have as their sole covering, when they are brought up the stairway some months later, a linen sheet wrapped loosely around them.

Put away in these cellars, and left lying there undisturbed for weeks and months at a time, the sharp and continued frosts preserve the bodies perfectly from decomposition. It is not until the intense heat at the time of the examination strikes them that they suddenly commence to decay.



The Bodies Are Tied to Stakes and Thawed Out.

(Drawn by a staff artist of the Journal.)

Then, as might be expected, the change is rapid in the extreme, minutes alone being sufficient. Hardly has the operating surgeon time enough to use his knife and the clerk to write down his report before it is too late.

So fantastic is the scene of this examination, so vividly horrible, and so strange and unprecedented in the annals of the world's history—though it is not to be doubted that as a custom it is hundreds of

years old—that it deserves to be pictured in all its details. These buildings are all alike. They stand alone, miles away from the villages, with the wide expanse of the steppes stretching about them. They seem almost fortresses, for their four walls and flat, straight roofs are unmarked by either windows or chimneys. The logs of which they are made are so beaten by storm and wind, and so incensed with snow that the whole structure seems to have grown out

of the very ground.

Usually half a dozen men make up the party that is to pass judgment and determine. Four of the six are peasants, and it is their duty to bring up the bodies one by one. It is a light task, and an easy afternoon or evening's work if the number of corpses runs under twenty. With a bit of paper in his hand, the clerk stands to take down the report as the doctor makes it. The surgeon himself has his sleeves tucked

interstices of the roof. With careful steps and grunting under the burdens, the peasants bring the bodies up the rough stairs. There are already iron stakes driven firmly into the frozen earth that forms the floor of the building. When all the grim pieces of clay that have been stored below are brought upstairs the stern official gives the sign.

At first the bodies are stiff and unyielding. Their eyes wide open and glazed, are signs of collapsing. What only a little earlier seemed an assemblage of ghostly apparitions, now changes to a grotesque crowd of moving forms that bear no semblance to life, but yet show in some curious way that they are nothing else than human.

The surgeon's hour now commences, and rapidly the building becomes a cruel dissecting room, each body being speedily subjected to the surgeon's knife. Most of the women shave their heads once a week, leaving only two narrow strips of hair from the crown to the temples. Many of the men follow the same practice, though the style is different, a circular patch of hair six inches in diameter being left, like a skull cap, on the crown of the head. Men sometimes shave each other's heads, but only when the services of a woman are not available, for it is one of the duties of the fair sex in these tribes to act as barbers. The eyebrows are generally removed also. The razor is a flake of quartz or glass.

These dwarfs are almost naked. The women wear small aprons of leaves, and never appear without them, but the men are not so modest. The men wear bunches of leaves attached to their knees and wrists. Garters, bracelets and necklaces of bones, shells or wood are common ornaments. Tattooing serves to a great extent as a substitute for raiment. Women do the tattooing. As a protection against the hot tropical sun the people smear their bodies with a whitewash of clay and water. Efforts to reclaim the Andamanese from their savage state have been productive of unnumbered woes. Homes have been established for their benefit by missionaries, but the native inmates of these institutions are fat and lazy, spending their time for days together in singing, dancing and feasting.

The most remarkable custom among these little persons is the wearing of necklaces of human bones. When a child dies the body is buried only to be dug up after a while. The father takes it to the seashore or the nearest creek, and there removes the flesh from the bones with the utmost care. This done, he brings the skull and bones back to his hut, and breaks up the latter into small pieces suitable for necklaces. The mother, after painting the skull with a yellow pigment and decorating it with small shells attached to pieces of string, hangs it around her neck. Sometimes her husband wears it himself. Infants' skulls, being fragile, are preserved carefully from risk of injury by being entirely covered with string.

The next few days are spent by the mother in stringing the bones into necklaces, and when several have been made she and her husband pay visits to their friends, among whom they distribute these mementoes. Such necklaces are worn as charms to ward off disease, and also, during illness, by friends or relatives of the dead child. Teeth taken from human skulls are sometimes strung together for necklaces. Every Andaman islander has at least one necklace of human bones.

The dwellings of the dwarfs are fragile huts with frameworks of slender poles and roofs of large palm leaves. A small fire is always burning indoors, and above it is a shelf on which the spare food is placed, so that it may be preserved by the smoke from the attacks of insects. Trophies of the chase, such as the skulls of pigs, turtles and dragons, are suspended from the roof in front. In various parts of the islands are found immense accumulations of bones and other kitchen refuse, dating back doubtless many centuries.

The villages are usually short-lived and very dirty. Crows and hermit crabs serve as scavengers, and clean them up as soon as a migration takes place. Before the arrival of the whites the Andamanese knew nothing of agriculture, never planting a seed in the ground. Though they prefer the fruits of the cultivated fields to the spontaneous products of their jungles, they cannot be induced to do farming work.

It is an old story that wherever civilization goes, with its diseases and whiskey and tobacco, it wipes out the primitive savage races. The Andaman Islands afford no exception to the rule. Both sexes drink and smoke. The aboriginal population there is rapidly disappearing, the death rate far exceeding the birth rate, and before very long this interesting little people will be practically extinct. They have delicate constitutions, not being able to withstand sicknesses from which Europeans easily recover. Fifty years is the extreme limit of age among them, and partly owing to the great mortality of infants, the average length of life is only about twenty-two years.

From time to time epidemics of measles and other complaints communicated from the whites have destroyed large numbers of them. The ill success in reaching their offspring is due in a great measure to the custom by which each infant is nursed by the women indiscriminately. In this manner diseases are spread. Yet it is a notable fact that no idiots or imbeciles are ever found among the Andamanese.

Odd Race of Pigmies.

Primitive Dwarfs Inhabit the Lonely Andaman Islands.

Women Shave Their Own and Their Husbands' Heads Once a Week.

Mothers Wear Their Babies' Skulls and Make Necklaces of the Infants' Bones.

SAILORS CALL THEM LITTLE NIGGERS

Newly Married Couples Pass Their Honeymoons in Silence—Rum and Tobacco Are Killing the Tiny Savages. Their Simple Religion.

Washington, Feb. 8.—A remarkable ethnological collection from the Andaman Islands has just reached the National Museum from Dr. Enrico Giglioli, director of the Florence Museum. It comprises a large number of objects illustrating the arts and industries of the strange race of dwarfs which inhabits an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal. Sailors have long known these dwarfs as "Little Niggers," because the average height of the men is only about 4 feet 10 inches, while the ordinary stature of the women is 4 feet 7 inches. Perhaps the oddest thing about them is that they look like babies all their lives. Withal they are probably the most primitive savages in the world. Until quite recently the dwarfs of the Andamans did not know how to make fire. On one of the islands of the archipelago there is an active volcano, from which they were accustomed formerly to obtain fresh supplies of fire at intervals. Special expeditions for this purpose were not often necessary, inasmuch as they knew how to keep fire burning in decayed wood. The people of a village, when leaving an encampment with the intention of returning in a few days, would take with them one or more smouldering logs. At the same time they would place a large burning log or fagot in a sheltered spot, where it would smoulder for a long while.

This method of keeping fire in decayed wood is still practised by the Little Niggers, especially in the interior of the larger islands, where they do not meet white men. Nothing introduced by the whites has excited their wonder so much as friction matches. To produce fire with such ease and quickness impressed them as a supernatural accomplishment.

Formerly the dwarfs of the Andamans were accustomed to murder all strangers who reached their shores. Indeed, sailors cast away in that part of the Bay of Bengal would probably be massacred even at the present day. It is believed that the inveterate hostility of the Little Niggers arose originally from the cruel practices of Malays, Burmese and Chinese, who, visiting the Andamans to get edible birds' nests and sea cucumbers, used to kidnap the natives and sell them as slaves.

There are several shades of color among these little persons, ranging from bronze to shiny black. Their hair is extremely frizzly, growing in spiral tufts. It is fine in texture and seldom more than two or three inches long. Most of the women shave their heads once a week, leaving only two narrow strips of hair from the crown to the temples. Many of the men follow the same practice, though the style is different, a circular patch of hair six inches in diameter being left, like a skull cap, on the crown of the head. Men sometimes shave each other's heads, but only when the services of a woman are not available, for it is one of the duties of the fair sex in these tribes to act as barbers. The eyebrows are generally removed also. The razor is a flake of quartz or glass.

These dwarfs are almost naked. The women wear small aprons of leaves, and never appear without them, but the men are not so modest. The men wear bunches of leaves attached to their knees and wrists. Garters, bracelets and necklaces of bones, shells or wood are common ornaments. Tattooing serves to a great extent as a substitute for raiment. Women do the tattooing. As a protection against the hot tropical sun the people smear their bodies with a whitewash of clay and water. Efforts to reclaim the Andamanese from their savage state have been productive of unnumbered woes. Homes have been established for their benefit by missionaries, but the native inmates of these institutions are fat and lazy, spending their time for days together in singing, dancing and feasting.

The most remarkable custom among these little persons is the wearing of necklaces of human bones. When a child dies the body is buried only to be dug up after a while. The father takes it to the seashore or the nearest creek, and there removes the flesh from the bones with the utmost care. This done, he brings the skull and bones back to his hut, and breaks up the latter into small pieces suitable for necklaces. The mother, after painting the skull with a yellow pigment and decorating it with small shells attached to pieces of string, hangs it around her neck. Sometimes her husband wears it himself. Infants' skulls, being fragile, are preserved carefully from risk of injury by being entirely covered with string.

The next few days are spent by the mother in stringing the bones into necklaces, and when several have been made she and her husband pay visits to their friends, among whom they distribute these mementoes. Such necklaces are worn as charms to ward off disease, and also, during illness, by friends or relatives of the dead child. Teeth taken from human skulls are sometimes strung together for necklaces. Every Andaman islander has at least one necklace of human bones.

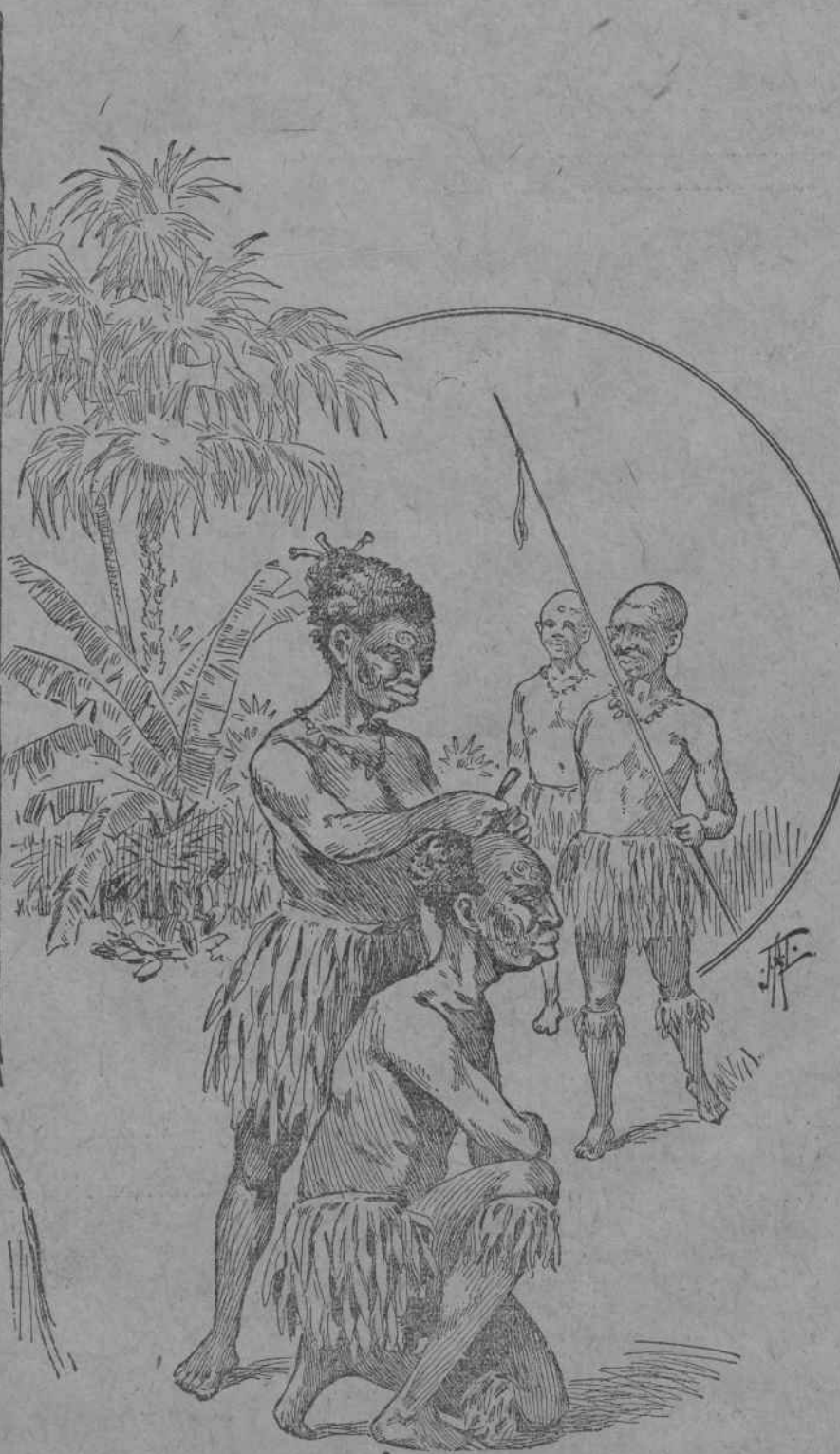
The dwellings of the dwarfs are fragile huts with frameworks of slender poles and roofs of large palm leaves. A small fire is always burning indoors, and above it is a shelf on which the spare food is placed, so that it may be preserved by the smoke from the attacks of insects. Trophies of the chase, such as the skulls of pigs, turtles and dragons, are suspended from the roof in front. In various parts of the islands are found immense accumulations of bones and other kitchen refuse, dating back doubtless many centuries.

The villages are usually short-lived and very dirty. Crows and hermit crabs serve as scavengers, and clean them up as soon as a migration takes place. Before the arrival of the whites the Andamanese knew nothing of agriculture, never planting a seed in the ground. Though they prefer the fruits of the cultivated fields to the spontaneous products of their jungles, they cannot be induced to do farming work.

It is an old story that wherever civilization goes, with its diseases and whiskey and tobacco, it wipes out the primitive savage races. The Andaman Islands afford no exception to the rule. Both sexes drink and smoke. The aboriginal population there is rapidly disappearing, the death rate far exceeding the birth rate, and before very long this interesting little people will be practically extinct. They have delicate constitutions, not being able to withstand sicknesses from which Europeans easily recover. Fifty years is the extreme limit of age among them, and partly owing to the great mortality of infants, the average length of life is only about twenty-two years.

From time to time epidemics of measles and other complaints communicated from the whites have destroyed large numbers of them. The ill success in reaching their offspring is due in a great measure to the custom by which each infant is nursed by the women indiscriminately. In this manner diseases are spread. Yet it is a notable fact that no idiots or imbeciles are ever found among the Andamanese.

A NEWLY DISCOVERED RACE OF DWARFS IN THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS.



It Is One of the Duties of the Women to Act as Barbers.

(Drawn by a Journal staff artist from sketches now in the National Museum at Washington.)

up and a sharp, gleaming knife in his hand. So primitive are these medical men of the far Eastern domain of the Czar that they seldom possess anything resembling a case of instruments.

More fagots are thrown on the fire, and the blaze leaps up and upward, thick black smoke curling around the logs of the ceiling, and finally forcing its way out of the

terrible in their unnaturalness. Long icicles cling to their hair, and the fire-dickering lights up their set, tense faces in a wild way that is beyond description. And then it is that for some strange reason the bodies begin to move as if worked by hidden wires. The hands of those that have had their arms clasped upon their breasts fall, the heads, an instant before erect, drop forward, and each figure shows

of the deceased. Not a muscle of the officials' faces move as they perform this duty of theirs. It is an old, old story with them, a round in a week after week and month after month, among buildings of this sort. Once a body is finished, it is given into the hands of the local authorities for burial, and is turned over by these latter to the family

They Wear Necklaces of Human Bones.